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MODERN LANGUAGE NOTES

VOL. XXIX.

BALTIMORE, MAY, 1914.

No. 5.

THE LEGEND OF ST. CHRISTINA BY WILLIAM PARIS

So infrequently can a medieval poem, or indeed one of much later origin, be precisely dated that there is considerable satisfaction in pinning a work down to a particular year by absolute evidence. When such a discovery of date reveals, even in a half-light, the personality of an obscure author and the elements of a very pretty story, the satisfaction is measurably increased. The case in point is not important of itself; but it has its bearings on the history of several great figures of Richard the Second's reign and, if I mistake not, on the contemporary reputation of Chaucer himself.

DATE AND AUTHORSHIP

In a manuscript (Arundel 168) containing also an anonymous legend of St. Dorothea, Capgrave's *Catharine*, and Lydgate's *Life of the Blessed Virgin* is preserved to us one of the four Middle English poems on St. Christina. This work¹ of 528 verses in eight-line stanzas, riming *ababbaba*, was written by an author otherwise unknown to us and, quite possibly, otherwise not an author at all. He names himself William Parys. The circumstances in which he composed his poem, as he himself relates them, enable us to fix with certainty the time when he wrote, and reveal something of his character. I quote his statement of the case (vv. 497-528):

Seint cristyne helpe thourought thi prayere
That we may fare the better for the,
That hath bene longe in prisone here,
The Ile of mane, þat stronge cuntre.²
Sire Thomas Brawchaump ane erle was he;
In Warwik-shire was his powere;
Now is he of so poure degre,
He hath no mane saue one squiere.

¹ Ms. Arundel 168, fols. 2a-4b. Ed. Horstmann, *Sammlung altenglischer Legenden*, 1878, pp. 183-190.

² Ms. reads "of mane of þat."

Where are his knyghtis þat with hyme yede
Whane he was in prosperite?
Where are the squiers now at nede
That sumetyme thoughte þei wold not flee?
Of yomene hade he grete plente
That he was wonte to cloth & feede.
Nowe is þer none of þe mene
That ons dare se þer lorde fore drede.

In prisone site þer lorde alone;
Of his mene he hath no moo
But William parys, be seint Johnne!
That with his wille wolde noght hime fro.
He made this lyfe in ynglishe soo
As he satte in prisone of stone,
Euer as he myghte tent þer to,
Whane he had his lordis seruice done.

Jhesu criste, goddeste sone of myghte,
As þou come downe to mende oure mysse
Ande in a clene virgyne þou lyghte,
Marie, þat now thi modire is,
Thou graunte alle grace þat hath herde this
In heuene of the to haue a sighte,
To se the sitte there in thi blisse
With seint cristyne, bi maydyne brighte!*

There can be no doubt that the "Sire Thomas Brawchaump" mentioned in the first stanza quoted is a mistake of the scribe for Sir Thomas Beauchamp, and that the imprisoned nobleman on the Isle of Man was no other than the governor of Richard II, the ally of the Duke of Gloucester and the Earl of Arundel: that Thomas de Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, who fell a victim in 1397 to the malevolent revenge of a king whose will he had helped to flout.

Of Thomas de Beauchamp's career but little need be said until the opening of its final chapter. He succeeded to his title in 1369, when twenty-four years of age, took part in John of Gaunt's French campaign in 1373, and in 1380 was appointed governor of the young king Richard II. About 1385 he joined the baronial party in opposition to the king, headed at

* For a collation of this passage I wish to thank my friend Professor Robert K. Root, whose readings I reproduce. In a few details the text differs from Horstmann's.

that time by Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester, and Henry of Derby, whom we know best as Bolingbroke. In November, 1387, he was a leader in the threatened uprising, managed by Gloucester, Earl Richard of Arundel, and himself, which humiliated the sovereign; and in the following February he was one of the five lords appellant who routed the king's favorites and for a time ruled England. Richard's *coup d'état* of May 3, 1389, destroyed the power of this coalition; but his singular moderation saved Warwick and his fellows from punishment.

During the summer of 1397, however, the king either became alarmed by the behavior of Gloucester, Arundel, and Warwick; or, as seems more probable, believed himself to be in a position to pay off old scores against the three noblemen. At all events, he had them arrested in July. Gloucester he sent to Calais for safe-keeping, Arundel to the Isle of Wight, and Warwick to the Tower.⁴ On the fifth of August⁵ all of them were impeached of treason. On September 16 the pardons issued to them for their actions ten years before were repealed.⁶ Before they could be brought to trial, Gloucester was dead in Calais, murdered by the king's order. Arundel was accused and beheaded on September 21;⁷ and on September 28⁸ Warwick was tried. In contrast to Arundel, he made an abject confession and was promptly sentenced to be drawn, hanged, and beheaded, and to forfeit his estates. On the following day this sentence was commuted by the king "q'il demurerait en perpetuel prison hors du Roialme en l'Isle de Man pur terme de sa vie. . . . Et q'il soit a la mere sur son passage vers le dit Isle de Man devaunt la fyn d'un moys apres yceste XXIX jour de

Septembre, a demurer illeques pur terme de sa vie, en la fourme suis dite. Et sur ceo, le dit Counte de Warr' fuist deliverez a Mon^sr William le Scrop, & a Mon^sr Estevene son frere, pur luy saufment amesner vers le dit Isle, & lui garder corps pur corps illeques, saunz lesser le dit Counte de Warr' departier hors de dit Isle."⁹ A chronicle in English gives the additional details that the trial was conducted with extraordinary precautions as to guards, and in a "long and large hous of tymber in the paleis at Westmynstre, that was callid an Hale; couered with tilez, and open on both sidez and atte endis, that alle men myghte se thorough."¹⁰ The same chronicle (p. 11) also records that the commutation of Warwick's sentence was "be instance of lordis, because he was of gret age"; but it seems more probable that the king's clemency was due to his satisfaction in witnessing the complete abasement of an old enemy.

Warwick must, according to his sentence, have arrived on the Isle of Man before the end of October, 1397. He left it, we are told, after the triumph of Henry of Lancaster in August, 1399.¹¹ The author of the *Annales Ricardi* further states that during his imprisonment Warwick "tractatus fuerat satis inhumane per ministros Willelmi Scrop, cui pertinuit regnum illud." To this matter we must presently return. At the moment, let me record that Warwick did not long survive his liberation, dying in April, 1401.

The bearing of this political history on the question of the date of our poem is evident. Paris says of Warwick (vv. 499-500):

That hath bene longe in prisone here,
The Ile of mane, þat stronge cuntre.

Although "long" is a sufficiently indefinite measure of time, Paris could scarcely have so

⁴ *An English Chronicle of the Reigns of Richard II, etc.*, ed. J. S. Davies (Camden Soc. LXIV, 1856), p. 8.

⁵ *Rolls of Parl.* III, 374 f.; *Annales Ricardi*, ed. H. T. Riley, p. 207 (*Rolls Ser.*, XXVIII^a); *Eulogium*, ed. J. S. Davies, in *An English Chronicle, etc.*, p. 130.

⁶ *Rolls of Parl.* III, 350.

⁷ *Id.* III, 377.

⁸ *Id.* III, 379.

⁹ *Id.*, III, 380.

¹⁰ *An English Chronicle*, ed. J. S. Davies, p. 9.

¹¹ *Annales Ricardi*, p. 252. J. H. R(ound) in the *Diet. of Nat. Biog.* states that Warwick was recommitted to the Tower on July 12, 1398. Of this I can find no evidence whatever; the record of the *Annales* is explicit.

designated the length of his exile before 1398 came in. On the other hand, he may have been writing during the early months of 1399. Within the limits thus set, the poem can safely be dated. The evidence is unusually complete.

With reference to two matters, furthermore, the evidence of the poem should be weighed for its bearing upon the judgments of history. In the first place, the devotion of Paris to his lord is so unfeigned that one cannot but believe that Thomas Beauchamp had more qualities of manliness than have been allowed to him by modern historians. He is represented to us by them as unscrupulous, time-serving, cowardly. Surely, if this were the whole story, he would have been somewhat less of a hero to his squire.

In prisone site þer lorde alone;
Of his mene he hath no moo
But William parys, be seint Johnne!
That with his wille wolle noght hime fro.

Unless he were a better man than is apparent from his political acts, Warwick could scarcely have commanded fidelity of this kind. It speaks well for William Paris, but it says something also for Warwick.

In the second place, the statement of the chronicle that Warwick was "inhumanly" treated during his exile by the servants of Scrope is not confirmed by the poem. Indeed, unless both Paris and his master were decently used, it is hard to see how the former could have written his legend. As we shall see, he did not get his material from the most obvious sources. Such a collection as the *Legenda Aurea* might conceivably have been among the exiles' effects, but it is not likely that they carried with them many books. It seems probable that they were given access to whatever library the island boasted. At all events, they were not entirely deprived of the consolations of literature. Furthermore—and this is, perhaps, more important—Paris makes no complaint of ill-treatment, as he assuredly would have done if he had felt that his lord was being subjected to harsh or unusual punishment. His only complaint is that Warwick's other followers have deserted.

LITERARY RELATIONS

As noted above, four poems on the passion of St. Christina exist in Middle English. In approximate chronological order, these are:

1. *De sancta Cristina*, in the expanded *North-English Homily Collection* as found in MS. Harl. 4196.¹²

2. *Cristine*, in the *Scottish Legend Collection*.¹³

3. *Crystine*, by William Paris.

4. *Vita Sanctae Christianae*, by Osbern Bokenam.¹⁴

In an attempt to discover the relations of these poems to one another and to their sources, I have compared them, phrase by phrase and incident by incident, with such versions of the Latin *Passio* as have been accessible to me. I have examined the texts in the *Acta Sanctorum*, Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum Historiale*, and Mombricitus, as well as the epitomes in *Legenda Aurea*, Petrus de Natalibus, and Surius. Reference to the invaluable *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina* will show, however, that the comparison I have made is very far from exhaustive. In particular, I regret that I have been unable to find in this country a copy of Pennazzi, *Vita e martirio ammirabile della gloriosa S. Cristina*, a book published in 1725 at Montefiascone, which contains several important Latin texts of the legend. Until those texts, at least, have been utilized, it is hardly worth the while to print the tabular analysis that I have prepared. No positive conclusions as to the sources of the Middle English poems can be reached until this work is done. For the present I must content myself with referring briefly to the results of the comparison as far as it has been made.

In general, it may safely be said of the four Middle English poems that they are independent translations from four distinct Latin ver-

¹² Ed. Horstmann, *Altenglische Legenden, neue Folge*, 1881, pp. 93-96.

¹³ Ed. Horstmann, *Barbour's Legendensammlung*, 1882, II, 177-181; Metcalfe, *Legends of the Saints in the Scottish Dialect of the Fourteenth Century* (S. T. S., 1896), II, 398-406.

¹⁴ Ed. Horstmann, *Osbern Bokenam's Legenden*, 1883, pp. 54-80.

sions of the *Passio*. Exclusions and inclusions of incidents, as well as order of events and discrepancies of detail, make this certain.

With reference to the sources of the English versions severally, my results are, as I have said, thus far unsatisfactory. The *Christina* of the *North-English Homily Collection* has some striking points of similarity to William Paris's poem as, for example, the baptism of the saint in the sea by Christ, where the two resemble the epitome of *Legenda Aurea*. On the other hand, in at least one trait the Harleian poem differs from every other version that I have examined: Christina is protected by a miraculous growth of hair from the shame of nakedness. Obviously, we have still to find the source.

The version of the *Scottish Legend Collection* has long been referred to the *Legenda Aurea* as its source. As is the case with other legends in that collection, however, there are marked discrepancies between the poem and the received text of the Latin. For example, the name of the judge who succeeded Christina's father is given by Graesse as Ellius, while it appears in the Scottish translation as Denyse.¹⁵ There can be no doubt, I think, that the Scottish *Christina* was translated from *Legenda Aurea*. The divergences in detail serve merely to show how valuable would be a variorum edition of James of Varragine.

As to the poem by William Paris, I have come no nearer a discovery of the exact source than in the case of the *Christina* of the Harleian ms. There is the same curious criss-cross of similarity and dissimilarity to all the Latin versions that I have yet examined.¹⁶ Possibly the Latin text used by Warwick's squire on the Isle of Man may have perished there; but it seems to me likely that a version very similar to it, at least, must still be in existence. It may be worth while to note that Paris's reference in his epilogue to Bul-

stene (Bolsena) as Christina's burial-place points to a Vatican ms.¹⁷ as representing this possible original.

Osbern Bokenam's poem, of the four, is the only one that greatly resembles the version printed in the *Acta Sanctorum*. Willenberg's conclusion¹⁸ that Bokenam did not translate precisely that version is unquestionably sound; but he must have used a Latin text closely related to it. There is every reason to hope that a fuller examination of extant texts will reveal his veritable source.

LITERARY INSPIRATION

Whether or no we have preserved to us the precise version of the *Passio* that William Paris translated, we can, I believe, discover what work he used as a model. It is less easy, to be sure, to trace with certitude relationships in style and manner than relationships in subject-matter; it is not possible in the present case to submit definite proof. Nevertheless, William Paris's legend seems to me so clearly an imitation of Chaucer's *Second Nun's Tale* (*Caecilia*) that I have no hesitancy about stating my opinion.

It has, in the first place, the same sobriety, the same simplicity, the same brevity, the same solidity; and it is by virtue of these qualities that Chaucer's legend is so successful a treatment of his theme. In both cases, of course, much of the value of the performance is to be ascribed to the Latin original. Yet one need not have read widely in verse translations of the Middle English, or of any other period of our literature, to know that the good qualities of a work may be singularly obscured by indifferent craftsmanship. I am not saying that William Paris was a great poet; he was, indeed, as far as one can make out, only a young gentleman with a taste for letters who whiled away the tedium of imprisonment by writing this one legend,

Euer as he myghte tent þer to,
Whane he had his lordis seruice done.

¹⁵ Brunet's translation gives it as Enius.

¹⁶ The snake-charmer is called Marces, for example: a misunderstanding of a class-name as a proper name that appears also in the text of Mombritius but not elsewhere. In other respects, there is marked divergence from that text.

¹⁷ Listed in *Bibl. Hag. Lat.* as 1748a.

¹⁸ *Engl. Stud.*, XII, 36.

Yet I am greatly mistaken in my notions of literary art if a young retainer of a great lord could have made in 1398 or 1399 a poem with precisely the qualities of this if he had not been a reader of Chaucer.

It is not that he used Chaucerian phrases; it is not that he refashioned the substance of his story and took Chaucer as his master of narrative art; it is simply a case where diction, turn of speech, and rhythmical movement constantly recall the manner of the great poet. Of the four poems on St. Christina, which I have mentioned, that by Paris is far and away the most interesting. It is the only one that has literary quality. Bokenam in his version does not lack interest, to be sure, for his personality makes all his legends individual; but Bokenam was a disciple of Chaucer in profession rather than in fact. Lydgate, and almost certainly Gower, led astray such writers as the Austin friar into paths of which Chaucer's literary taste would have disapproved. In Paris there is no parade of learning—probably the squire had little; and no polysyllabic rimes sprawl their slow lengths upon his verse. He wrote vigorously and not ungracefully, even if not with great mastery. The trick of such verse-making must, I believe, have come from Chaucer, who was a magnificent artificer as well as a great story-teller, a wonderful humorist, and an admirable observer of life.

Paris was, it must be admitted, not very fortunate in his choice of a subject. The legend of St. Christina has not in it the possibilities that Chaucer turned to such good account in narrating the life of St. Caecilia. Yet he made of the crude tale as satisfactory a poem as might have been expected if it had been done by a versifier of much greater experience and of much more renown. To Chaucer, as well as to Paris, be the glory, since he must have been "the only begetter" of this rather charming waif from the end of the fourteenth century.

If my belief be correct as to the inspiration of the legend, the evidence that it affords of Chaucer's influence upon the court circle of his time is not without interest. If Paris indeed took him as his model, it is clear that the troubled days of King Richard were not with-

out their mitigations. It is pleasant to reflect that letters could be a solace to the retainer of an exiled lord and that, at court or in banishment, the spirit of the yet-living Chaucer could dominate his mind.

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OLD NORSE NOTES¹

IV. ETYMOLOGY OF *þengill*

Of the many Old Icelandic poetic synonyms (*ókend heiti*) for 'king,' 'prince,' 'hero,' 'man,' some few have remained obscure in origin and etymology. Among these the word *þengill* is one of the most common. Noreen² brings the word into connection with *þing*, "popular assembly." The Old Norwegian form *þingill* which he cites appears, however, to be a secondary development of the older *þengill*³ and the relation between *þengill* and *þing*, if there be one, entirely remote. Konráð Gíslason⁴ was obviously nearer the truth in rejecting the connection of the former word with *þing* and insisting upon that with *þang* (= "sea-weed": Swedish *tång*, Danish *Tang*; German *Tang* is a loan-word from the Scandinavian). The difficulty is in this case a semiological one. Gíslason called attention to *þongull*, which is an exactly parallel formation to *þengill* with suffix-gradation (*-ula*, *-ila*-, the *ø* and *e* representing respectively *u*- and *i*-umlaut of *a*), and which, according to Gíslason, applied to a particularly large and hard species of sea-weed. Gíslason thought the word *þengill* might then have been used of a man, characterizing him as surpassing other men in the same proportion as the *þongull* surpassed other kinds of sea-weed (*þang*). That this explanation is unlikely is at once apparent.

¹ Cf. *Mod. Lang. Notes*, XXVI (1911), pp. 46-50.

² *Altisl. und altnorw. Gramm.*³ (1903), § 161.

³ Cf. O. Rygh, *Gamle Personnavne i norske Stedsnavne* (1901), pp. 246 f.

⁴ *Forelæsninger over oldnordiske Skjaldekvad*, pp. 199 f., published 1895.